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ABSTRACT

In general, minorities, especially blacks, approach career education warily, fearing it might turn out to be a new name for an old game. Statistics indicate the minority dilemma; for example, unemployment among minorities 16 and older is nearly twice the white unemployment rate. A number of critical questions about career education as related to minorities need to be answered. Some of the basic issues leading to minority skepticism toward career education follow. Career education is sometimes equated with a discredited vocationalism, and vocational education has done little to bring about economic parity. Career education should be integrated into the curriculum. It should help break down job discrimination based on race or sex and should not be a deterrent to the gains by blacks in higher education. Another issue relates to the role of the schools in teaching basic skills necessary to qualify for a job or career. Career education should also allow for the development of ethnic awareness. The question is: Is career education the direction that will lead to educational and economic parity with the majority? If, however, career education becomes a way to maintain discrimination through the tracking of minority students, the result will be to further alienate the minorities from the educational system. (LMS)

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CAREER EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MINORITIES

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CAREER EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MINORITIES

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

For the most part, career education, generally, has been warmly received. Yet, there are some who look distrustfully upon it. This is especially true for many minority members from education, business and government. As minorities, we can particularly understand the well-founded doubt in the minority communities of America as to whether any Anglo can understand the thinking of Blacks, Chicanos, Orientals, or Native Americans, particularly their feelings toward a majority that has been historically ruthless in suppressing minority aspirations and dreams. Hence, in general, minorities, especially Blacks (our frame of reference) approach career education warily, fearing that it might turn out to be, as many Blacks suspect, simply a new name for an old game or a more sophisticated vocational education or a more fancy way to train poor people for a cheap labor market, or to track minority students away from college entrance.

The concept called career education has evolved from long standing discontent with the present system which few seem to feel satisfies either the needs of individuals or society. Most people see much of what is taught as irrelevant in terms of preparation for life in either social or the economic spheres.

Career education has been proposed as a remedy for these obvious failures--for the low productivity of an 85 billion dollar education industry--by relating a student's education and training to his/her life and career objectives.

One of the many definitions offered for the concept comes from the U.S. Office of Education:

> Career education is the total effort of public education and the community aimed at helping all individuals to become familiar with the values of a work-oriented society, to integrate these values in their lives in such a way that work becomes possible, meaningful, and satisfying to each individual.

We have no serious quarrel with the above definition nor the many other general definitions, although we feel they can be criticized, because it is precisely in the broad implications of some of the definitions that there is much room for educational reforms.

If we can give you just a short definition of what we see in career education it is an opportunity available to children and young people to have a better knowledge of the world of work and of something other than going to college as the end-all and be-all of our lifetime in education.

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois seem to have set the pattern for a philosophical distinction between vocational and academic education (Davenport and Petty, 1973). Washington felt that for the masses of black Americans, the route to success in the financial and social spheres lay through the acquisition of the manual skills which are in demand by the nation as a whole, while Dubois felt that success would come through the development of those mental faculties which would result in Blacks being competitive at the managerial or executive levels. Unfortunately both of these arguments still exist today with the resultant dichotomy. We share the hope of Petty and Davenport (1973) that career education may finally lead to a merging of distinctions.

While the goals of education are debated as they always have been, there is general agreement that something new is needed. Many solutions have been proposed: open classrooms, performance contracting, the Voucher system, etc. By far the most far-reaching is career education.

The need for change has been widely recognized, especially by minority groups. Available statistics on the position of minorities in the educational system and in society speak very eloquently to this fact.

THE MINORITY DILEMMA

Unemployment among minorities 16 and older is 9.9 percent nationally, nearly twice the white unemployment rate of 5.4 percent. Joblessness for minority teenagers is 26 percent, while the white rate is half of that. You know that a minority worker will find himself out of work far more often than a white worker, that he is far more likely to be a part-timer than his white counterpart, and that the jobs themselves, particularly among minority males, are much more likely to be lower-paying and less desirable in most other aspects. Other indicators show that:

> In 1970, one out of every seven black tennagers 14 to 19 years of age dropped out of school.
>
> In 1970, income for Blacks and other minorities was $6,279 as compared to $10,236 for whites.
>
> Despite years of occupational upgrading, about two-fifths of all male workers of Negro and other races remained in service, labor or farm occupations in 1970.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

While the above statistics reflect the 1970 census data, little has changed since then. The fact remains that much of the bleakness of the employment and education picture can be traced directly to the inadequacy of the school systems which purport to be training grounds for minorities. The need for change would be agreed to by all minority groups; however, the following questions emerge:

1. Is career education the answer for minorities, especially for Blacks and the Black community trapped in either an educational or an economic wasteland?

2. Is career education the direction that will lead to educational and economic parity with the majority?

3. What role will schools play in breaking down job discrimination?

4. How will career education be tied into remedial education?

5. How does career education mesh with the need of minorities for ethnic awareness?

6. Is career education another name for discredited vocational education?

7. Is career education an attempt to divert intelligent minority group scholars away from academic fields?

8. Will career education help minorities to crack the discriminatory hiring practices of certain employers and open hiring halls of all unions?

These are some of the concerns which prompted the development of this paper and the discussions which will follow. These issues must be legitimately and honestly dealt with if the concept is to have any chance of success. A candid discussion of these concerns have special significance to Black Americans and perhaps other ethnic and/or racial minorities.

CAREER EDUCATION VS. VOCATIONALISM

Career education is an outgrowth of many influences and movements. Its concept is being illustrated by a variety of practices at the local school level through out the country. These practices reflect a variety of views regarding career education ranging from a new term for vocational education to a new focus on the curriculum in general. Curricular patterns emphazing career education of many variations developed in the early years ot this decade. Consequently, it gained visibility as a movement beginning around 1971 in order to bring about curriculum relevancy.

Actually the concept of career education began much earlier dating back to the realization of theories of vocational choice as expounded by Carter, Ginzberg, Super et al. In fact, Carter's early work relative to vocational choice as a developmental process predates 1940 (Crites, 1969). Unfortunately these theories developed during a period when Blacks were considered as second class citizens. As a result, discriminatory hiring practices narrowed the career options available to black citizens and other minority groups. The sophisticated theories of vocational choice, had no special significance or real value to the vocational development of minorities. Moreover, there is no doubt in my mind that these theories were ever put into practice to any large degree by guidance counselors, teachers and others who are responsible for the intellectual, social and personal growth of our children. In view of the increasing emphasis on multicultural education and ethnic awareness, it is apparent that more research is needed to determine the real significance of vocational choice theories in an age of cultural pluralism. Research efforts should also be directed toward the practical application of such theories in the curriculum with particular focus on blacks and other minorities.

A concept of career education was also realized by the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1963 and later re-emphasized to a large measure by the 1968 amendments.

The Vocational Education Act of 1963 called for significant expansion and re-orientation of curricula in vocational education. Prior to this, vocational education had been categorically limited to agriculture, home economics, trade and industrial education, and distributive education. The 1963 legislation paved the way for school systems to offer a broad range of career options to their students.

The Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 represented the most comprehensive legislation ever passed by Congress for the support of vocational and technical education. As a result of the exemplary programs and other provisions of the act, several school curricula that focused on the world of work emerged. The definition of vocational education was expanded to include all of those special aspects of educational experiences which help a person to discover his talents, to relate them to the world of work, to choose an occupation, and to refine his talents, and use them successfully in employment. The act also stipulated that vocational education should include pre-vocational experiences such as group guidance and counseling, work experience, pre-technical subjects, and other innovative measures that will broaden the occupational aspirations of youth and give them information from which meaningful vocational choices can be made.

One can see that career education is deeply rooted in the concept of vocationalism in this country as interpreted by the provisions of Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its 1968 amendments. Unfortunately the same myths and skepticism people have about vocational education are still prevalent in the eyes of many. For example, there are vocational educators who translate career education as a new term for vocational education, academic teachers who view it as an extra field trip or a visit to the vocational shops and guidance counselors who envision it as more career days and the placement of more noncollege bound students into vocational programs. Moreover, many Industrial Arts teachers claim that career education is nothing new to what they are already doing.

These views have added to the confusion that already exists among the public and particularly among the black segment of society. It is imperative that future research efforts relative to career education provide explicit guidelines that will eradicate the confusion which is apparent. If career education is to

address the problems and needs of black people in this country its concept and practice must be clearly defined as separate from vocational education, general education, and guidance. This is not to say that these disciplines don't have unique contributions to make to the movement. Make no mistake about it, for indeed they do. However, many Blacks are apprehensive about vocational education and the motives of guidance counselors. They feel for the most part that vocational education is another way to keep them in the bondage which has overshadowed their lives for many years. Guidance is perceived as a mechanism by which this is done. Career education being closely allied to these areas in programmatic thrust and concept is unable to mesh with the needs of Blacks because it is considered another name for "discredited vocational education.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Here are some basic issues relative to the feeling of skepticism which is quite prevalent among Blacks and perhaps other minorities.

First, the discrepancies in the social structure and values of society pose several problems which negate opportunities for success. Blacks and other minority groups have been stereotyped as being products of subcultures, values and customs which are usually unacceptable in terms of middle-class standards. As a result, the fear of being overpowered by values and customs foreign to them and the lack of recognition from teachers and guidance counselors who social backgrounds are different is a constant agony for our black students. An important step in the total development of individuals is the recognition of the positive aspects of their lives.

The second issue concerns the practice of discouraging Blacks from entering certain occupational fields because of hiring practices and union restrictions.

As a result the career choices opened to many black youths were limited to a few professional and/or vocational areas. For the most part, Blacks were trained in low-skilled jobs, and jobs which were highly vulnerable to technological changes.

Third, in spite of efforts to focus on the needs of people, vocational education has done little to bring about economic parity among black people in this country. This is evident by the high unemployment rate that exist among black Americans particularly those between the ages of 16 and 22. The figure doubles their white counterparts.

The Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its Amendments of 1968 were the products of a growing sensitivity to human welfare, and their emphasis was upon the people who needed vocational education rather than upon the occupations which needed people. Recognizing two major weaknesses in traditional vocational education programs: (1) lack of sensitivity to the changes in the labor market and (2) lack of sensitivity to the needs of various segments of the population, Congress gave fundamental and philosophical attention along with financial resources to the area that should have pave the way for more flexibility in addressing the needs of Blacks and other minority groups. Commendable efforts have been made to extend and expand vocational education offerings, but there is little evidence of much effort to develop a well articulated program, bridging the gap between "vocational" and "academic" education as envisioned by Congress.

The fourth issue is related to the dichotomy that still exists between the academic and vocationalism. This dichotomy has misled the public in thinking that one form of education is better than the other. This separatism is the educational system was strongly opposed by John Dewey and others. Sensing the inherent danger of developing dualism in the educational arena, Dewey strongly urged the integration of vocational education into the general school curriculum stressing the benefits that would accrue to both forms of education. (Dewey, 1963)

Unfortunately, the generalists and the vocationalists did not heed Dewey's warning. The dualism is also reflected in the manner in which certain career education programs are being conceptualized and implemented.

Career Education, if it is to be effective in meeting the needs of society and particularly the black segment of society, must be fused into the curriculum with continuing emphasis on the developmental tasks of an individual.

Bloom identified these continuing emphases as "integrative threads and defines them as "any idea, problem, method, or device by which two or more separate learning experiences are related" (Bloom, 1958). Integrative threads are defined by Ralph W. Tyler (1950) as "organizing elements" which are identified as concepts, skills, or values around which specific learnings are to be woven. The point being made is that career education must not be perceived as an "add on" to the "Vocational Curriculum" or the so called "General Education Curriculum". Career education experiences must be viewed as organizing elements or focal points which give direction to the curriculum as a whole. This is an important step in reducing the apprehension and skepticism many Blacks have toward the concept of vocationalism.

Such a view of career education was expressed by Doherty (1972) when he suggested that career education is an integral dimension of the nursery through an adult curriculum which provides for all students a sequential continuum of experiences through which each individual may develop a more realistic perception of his capabilities and prepare him for entry and re-entry into employment and/or continuing education. Another important concept in implementing career guidance was pointed out by Charles W. Ryan (1974) when stated that "Career Education programs and practices will involve students, teachers, parents, administrative staff, and various individuals from the community in an interdisciplinary effort to infuse all elements of education with relevant career development tasks."

The fifth issue relates to those twin "isms" -- racism and sexism -- and the possibility of there being built into career education. All the careful planning and curriculum infusion in the world will be lost, if prejudice against minority group persons or female persons is allowed to pervade the world of work as it is today. If businesses and unions are allowed to restrict the advancement of well qualified persons on the basis of color, ethnicity or sex then career education will expire with the handing out of the diplomas. Blacks and other minorities must be encouraged and be supported by both the educational and industrial enterprises to enter heretofore restricted to those who differ from the dominant middle class model. And no amount of preparation will ready a Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, or Native American youngster to meet rejection because of his heritage.

It can be argued that there were more per capita building trades craftsmen in the Black community during the slavery years than exist there now. Will career education lend a hand in breaking down job discrimination and use its influence to place Black youth in apprenticeship programs? We hope the answer is yes.

A sixth issue relates to whether career education can respond to the Black community needs or just offer only tangenital benefits. Amidst, this concern, is the feeling that career education runs counter in many aspects to the drive to add to the ranks of Black college trained professionals. Black Americans made impressive advances in education in the past 15 years, and the trend is still upward. Black college student enrollment has doubled and almost tripled. It is projected by the Labor Department that 80 percent of young Black adults will hold a high school diploma by 1980; college-enrolled Blacks by 1980 should comprise about 10 to 20 percent of the total. The concern simply is that Blacks

must make sure career education is not a deterrent to the gains by Blacks in higher education.

The seventh issue as viewed by many minority leaders is the role of the schools in career education if they continue failing to teach simple verbal and computational skills necessary to qualify for a job or career. Blacks and other minorities cannot afford the luxury of postponing the acquisition of good basic skills in favor of career awareness or exploration.

A real cutting concern (eighth issue) has to do with the ability of career education to allow for the development of multi-cultural traditions, interests and studies or how it will mesh with the need of minorities for ethnic awareness. While we can agree that work is a major component of a person's life, other parts are equally important and are equally the province of formal education. Unless career education helps to develop a three dimensional human being who has knowledge of and interest in his culture as well as the cultures of others and the many heritages that make up the American society, it will have produced another robot in a materialistic society.

The ninth and final issue deals with what can be referred to as an "implementation gap;" the same teachers and counselors who have been implementing career education. The nature of career education will depend heavily on those educators now teaching in the present system--there have been no indications in the last decade that this patchwork approach to solving the problems of education will change significantly with the advent of career education. On the contrary, it may be used as a weapon of oppression against the community of nonwhites in this country, trapping them into an occupational fiefdom of servitude to a privileged professional class.

Colin Greer (19--) documents the fact that American schools have not opened the doors of opportunity to minorities. Public education has served the needs of the dominant classes of society.

These are some of the issues that are currently being discussed by minority leaders aware of the career education concept; they must be dealt with if the concept is to have any chance of success. Many of the questions relate directly to the educational philosophy of the nation as a whole. Many now feel that we should be moving away from the abstract, which cannot be measured, to the specific, which is quantifiable; from teaching to think, to teaching to do. This would have special significance to minorities, who as a group have been called unqualified to hold many of the skilled jobs. If career education is feasible, this situation should swiftly disappear. No longer could lack of training be used as an excuse for discrimination (Davenport and Petty, 1973).

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF CAREER EDUCATION FOR MINORITIES?

It is time to understand that the implications for any educational program for minorities are directly related to what happens at the other end of the program. What does a successful career education program (however that is defined) do for minorities, particularly Blacks, when they come out at the end of the line?

Any program, particularly career education, must be related to the economic realities. Regardless of how successful career education is, if the economy is such that unemployment among young Blacks 21 and over continues at its present rate of 35 to 40 percent, it will not make any difference whether the program graduates are skilled and are prepared to go into any particular career field or not. That's the reality Blacks and other minorities live with everyday.

The target population herein discussed in this paper and for which career education purports to serve, must be aided in penetrating careers they have traditionally been barred from if this thrust in public education is to be viable. Black and minority people want a piece of the pie--a slice of the American Dream. Career education must not be a deterrent to that dream.

It is absolutely necessary that in order for the present form of Career Education to have any meaning to Black and minority people it must design into its structure assurances against economic and occupational disfranchisement for the Black and poor.

As minority representatives, we prefer to remain optimists. Yet our optimism is not to be devoid of a healthy sprinkling of skepticism when confronted with new concepts, including that of career education, until such time as the tools to back up the concept are presented in palpable, comprehensible and tanable manner.

There is an old saying or proverb--which says that a cat which has been burned with hot milk will even blow at cottage cheese. This is the position of many blacks on career education. We in the Black community have been burned by hot milk--not only vocational education but the whole educational system--and many Blacks wish to blow on the cottage cheese--career education--before partaking of it.

We are not saying that as Black educators we cannot accept the concept of career education. Both of us have been working to develop curriculum relevance and educational systems that incorporate most of the ideas upon which career education is based. SO--it is not the concept of career education about which we have questions. It is with the implementation of the concept that is our greatest concern. It is with the many, many safeguards that need to be taken to insure that Blacks, Chicanos, Indians and other minorities receive from the

educational system the services they deserve. So the question still is: Is Career Education the direction that will lead to educational and economic parity with the majority? Minorities have looked with anticipation on many new concepts from the Federal government which were to be the saviors of education.

Many questions can be raised regarding Career Education and its implications for minorities. We should like to think the concept of Career Education holds, potentially, greater promise for Black students as well as other minority school children to attain a good education and preparation for interesting and constructive careers than any of the civil rights acts, Supreme Court decisions, and plans for improving education for Blacks and other minorities that have occurred in recent years. Though these acts and court decisions have given black students "equal opportunity," it must be recognized that the only gain has been "equality" in a white educational system that is just as ill-suited to the needs of white students as it is to the needs of Blacks. "Benigh neglect" can no longer be our response to minority group (and more especially Blacks) pleas for equal educational opportunity. This attitude arouses resentment, hostility and other strong negative emotions. At the other extreme it produces apathy, depression and even paranoia. America cannot afford these reactions among its minorities and many enlightened white Americans.

We have the capability of positive, healing action through Career Education. Do we have the moral courage? Do we have the commitment?

Of concern to many minorities is the internalization or institutionalization of the concept career education. The Black community, for example, has seen many "rip offs" of federal funds, with the program started with federal funds dying once these funds are not available anymore; thus one of the dangers minority groups face in supporting career education is that the federal govern-

ment will once again fail to undertake the longterm funding effort required for carrying out a major educational reform.

For once, minority communities are not waiting trustfully for the next panacea, but are questioning the concepts, the methods, and motives behind the idea. Experience has taught Blacks and other minorities to be cynical. We know that career education can only work to the extent that employment and career opportunities for all people are actually improved.

So--just like that cat would want to blow at cottage cheese after he had been burned with hot milk, it may be advisable for minorities to blow on career education.

If career education can fulfill its promises, it will be welcomed by all. If, however, it becomes a way to maintain discrimination through the tracking of minority students, if its goal is to develop a pool of skilled labor for industry, if it is just another educational fad, the result will be to further alienate the minorities from an educational system seen as repressive, irrevalent and non-responsive to their needs. If that be the case, career education needs to be exposed as simply another educational mirage which offers little hope for anyone -- especially America's minorities; however, this doesn't have to be the case, it can be (thoughnot perfect) a legitimate viable means of attacking the social, economic and educational ills of our society. Will it be? That's the question. The jury is still out and, likewise, so are many of America's hopeful minorities.

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